

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ANTANA 00646 150749Z

ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 XMB-02 EB-08 AGR-01 COME-00 CIAE-00

INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05

DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

ICA-11 /086 W

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R 141433Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 403

INFO AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 0646

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MA

SUBJ: POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE TENSES UP IN MADAGASCAR

REF: ANT 0627 (NOTAL)

1. THERE ARE INCREASING REPORTS CIRCULATING OF (A) UNREST IN LABOR AND RURAL CIRCLES AND (B) TENSIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAVE BEEN STRIKES AMONG BLUE COLLAR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND AT THE BATA SHOE WORKS IN ANTANANARIVO. A COMBINATION LOCKOUT AND STRIKE CONTINUES AT THE LARGE COTONA TEXTILE MILL AT ANTSIRABE. AT THIS LARGE ENTERPRISE, WHOSE OWNERS THE GOVERNMENT IS PRESENTLY TRYING TO FORCE TO ACCEPT MAJORITY GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP IN EXCHANGE FOR A VERY SMALL PAYMENT, THE LABOR FORCE IS AT TIMES NOT WORKING AND AT OTHERS KEEPING THE SENIOR MANAGERS FROM ENTERING THE PREMISES. SPECULATION IS THAT THIS MIGHT BE AT GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGEMENT.

2. SEVERAL SOURCES ALSO REPORT THAT THEY HAVE HEARD OF GUNFIRE IN
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ANTANA 00646 150749Z

THE SOUTH BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND THE POPULATION BUT NO ONE SEEMS TO KNOW WHETHER THIS OCCURRED IN CONNECTION WITH A CAMPAIGN AGAINST CATTLE THIEVES OR HAD POLITICAL CONNOTATIONS. GIVEN THE POPULARITY OF CATTLE RUSTLING AS AN OUTDOOR SPORT IN THE SOUTHERN REGIONS, THE TWO CONTEXTS MIGHT NOT BE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.

3. THESE REPORTS OF UNREST CIRCULATE AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF A SHORTAGE OF RICE AND OTHER ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS WHICH IS BECOMING OF INCREASING CONCERN TO THE POPULATION AND THE SUBJECT OF MUCH PRESS ATTENTION (REFTEL).

4. ACCORDING TO SOME SOURCES, THIS ACCUMULATION OF UNFAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS HAS CREATED TENSIONS WITHIN THE HIGHER REACHES OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE EXTREME LEFTISTS IN THE SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (SRC) LED BY MANANDAFY RAKOTONIRINA ARE USING THE PRESENT SITUATION TO PRESS THE ARGUMENT THAT ONLY A MORE RAPID AND COMPREHENSIVE SOCIALIZATION OF THE ENTIRE ECONOMY WILL ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE COUNTRY. RESISTENCE TO THIS ARGUMENT BY THE MODERATES HAS RESULTED IN DIVISIONS AND HOSTILITY. SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS, AWARE OF THESE CLEAVAGES, ARE EXTREMELY UNEASY AND RELUCTANT TO TAKE ANY ACTION AT THIS TIME FOR FEAR OF BEING CRITICIZED IN THE FUTURE DEPENDING UPON WHICH FACTION WINS OUT.

5. COMMENT: THIS IS A FIRST REPORT ON THIS DEVELOPMENT IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE, AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO HAZARD A GUESS AS TO WHETHER IT WILL HAVE ANY LASTING OR SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES. ONE ASPECT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION COULD ARGUE FOR THE SERIOUS VIEW. ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO GRADE THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN TWO OF ITS THREE PRIORITY AREAS, EDUCATION AND PUBLIC SECURITY, IT IS EASIER TO RENDER A JUDGMENT
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PAGE 03 ANTANA 00646 150749Z

IN THE THIRD, RICE CULTIVATION AND DISTRIBUTION. IN THAT FIELD IT IS APPARENT TO ALL THAT PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA HAS SO FAR BEEN BATTING ZERO. BARRETT

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